



# The Mountain-Prairie Review

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August 2002

## Visitors Enjoy Crescent Lake Refuge Open House

By Deserai Anderson-Utley

As several visitors left the headquarters office to continue their guided tour of the Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge facilities the AirLink helicopter from Scottsbluff, Nebraska landed, creating a nice cool breeze on a 100 degree day. The AirLink helicopter was just one of many learning experiences visitors to Crescent Lake NWR enjoyed on that hot June day. The refuge, located in the western Nebraska Sandhills hosted an open house on Saturday June 29, 2002. There were about 125 people that made the 28 mile drive to the remote refuge to attend the open house.



Young visitors enjoy an airboat ride at Crescent Lake NWR in June.

Research assistants Chris Warren, Beth Nicholls and Steve Dinklacker explained their turtle research under the shade of an ash tree. They also gave reptile demonstrations. Many visitors enjoyed learning about the snakes and some were even adventurous enough to hold them, though the five foot bullsnake with an attitude didn't get many takers.

The Wildland fire fighting demonstrations that gave visitors the opportunity to learn were very popular and informative. Local entertainer Otto Rossfeld of Valentine, Nebraska presented two living history programs entitled "Sandhills Song" and what life was like in the Sandhills of Nebraska before electricity, by playing many songs, both humorous and educational, on his guitar.

Many visitors also got to experience a ride on an airboat. Two airboats were in operation for most of the day. One airboat belonged to Crescent Lake NWR and the other was on loan from the Rainwater Basin WMD in Kearney, NE. Visitors toured the Island Lake, a popular refuge fishing lake.

The Nebraska Jr. Duck Stamp art was on display for viewing in the refuge shop. The focus of the open house was educating visitors about next year's centennial of the National Wildlife Refuge System as well as the mission of Crescent Lake NWR and the tools utilized to accomplish that mission.

## FWS Director Visits Mountain-Prairie Region

By Deserai Anderson-Utley

The Mountain-Prairie Region hosted U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Steve Williams on August 5, 2002. The Director began his visit to the region with a stop at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge for a cook-out with about thirty employees, followed by a tour of the refuge on a propane powered tram. While at the Arsenal, Williams was also able to visit the National Wildlife and Eagle Repository, where confiscated wildlife products are stored and eagles are prepared for distribution to Native Americans.

After his tour of the refuge, Williams met with employees at the Regional Office in Lakewood. Williams emphasized two goals that he has for the Service during his tenure. He would like to see FWS focus on restoring its relationships with traditional partners and improve its scientific credibility. Although he believes that FWS science is good, he pointed out that the Service has to convince others of that fact. He reminded regional employees to do their jobs well to demonstrate that the Service is made up of dedicated and talented people.

After answering employee questions, Williams was treated to some Mountain-Prairie region memorabilia. Regional Director Ralph Morgenweck presented Williams with gifts on behalf of the regional employees, including a replica of a Pallid Sturgeon.

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# Chronic Wasting Disease Update

By Matt Kales

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is rapidly emerging as one of the most significant wildlife management issues in the Mountain-Prairie Region and the nation. CWD is a fatal disease of elk, whitetail deer, and mule deer, and is part of a “family” of nervous system diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) that includes scrapie in sheep, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (also known as “Mad Cow Disease”), and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, which afflicts humans. At present, the causes of these diseases is unknown, though all TSEs are associated with the presence, in the infected organism, of abnormal prion proteins.

CWD was first diagnosed in captive cervids in Colorado in the 1960s. However, over the past five years, the disease has spread to wild herds in several surrounding states and parts of Canada. Earlier this year, CWD was detected in Wisconsin and New Mexico, raising both a host of new questions about the “behavior” of this disease and the specter of an epidemic that would, in turn, have likely profound ecological and economic impacts on affected areas. One immediate concern among state fish and game agencies, for example, is that the hunting public, fearful of contracting CWD from eating contaminated meat, will simply opt not to hunt, depriving states of a critical wildlife management tool, as well as the much-needed

revenue stream generated by hunting licenses.

The Service is involved with CWD management efforts on both the regional and national levels. Here in the Mountain-Prairie Region, Refuges is developing guidance for field stations on control and response measures, Migratory Birds/State Programs are determining the types of CWD control measures eligible for funding through Federal Aid, and Ecological Services are considering the NEPA implications of such measures and activities. Additionally, External Affairs is coordinating with other bureaus here in the region, including National Park Service and U.S. Geological Survey, on outreach activities. Several staff from the Regional Office, and Director Steve Williams, participated in a two-day symposium on CWD held in Denver in earlier this month. The symposium drew more than 300 scientists, wildlife managers, and representatives from nongovernmental organizations across the country.

At the national level, Director Williams is co-chairing an interagency task force charged by Congress with developing an implementation plan for assisting the states in combating CWD. The implementation plan, which will be completed by mid-September, will outline the primary topical areas, (e.g., research, communication), on which federal agencies will focus in their efforts to assist states in

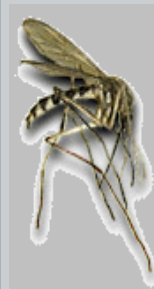
combating CWD. The implementation plan will provide direction and funding to those agencies, including the Service, working to control CWD.

While numerous questions about CWD remain (perhaps most notably whether it is transmissible to humans), it is clear that this disease, and its implications for wildlife management in North America, has struck a resonant chord among wildlife professionals and the public, making it likely that CWD will remain a high-profile issue for the foreseeable future.

For more information on CWD, check out the following websites: USGS National Wildlife Health Center: [www.nwhc.usgs.gov](http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov) USDA Veterinary Service: [www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/cwd.htm](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/cwd.htm) Colorado Division of Wildlife: [www.wildlife.state.co.us](http://www.wildlife.state.co.us)

## West Nile Virus confirmed in S.D.

By Kenneth Torkelson



Infected crow from Hub City tests positive for West Nile Virus by a mosquito bite.

To view more information about West Nile Virus, you may go to:

<http://www.westnilefever.com>

## **Janet Breeling Hired for NEW SCEP Maintenance Position at Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuge**

By Bryan Schultz



Janet is currently a student at Metropolitan Community College (Omaha, Nebraska), in the Industrial Maintenance Program. The SCEP or Student Career Experience Program is for students with a good work history, and a demonstrated interest in work of this type. Janet will be performing general grounds maintenance duties,

to include moving, landscaping, and equipment familiarization/maintenance. Janet will be also doing carpentry, trim and painting work at a cabin residence that will be used for student interns and researchers when it is completed. For more information about the SCEP position or current activities at Boyer Chute NWR, Fort Calhoun, NE, please contact Michael Ellis, Refuge Operations Specialist, at 402-468-4313.

## **New Positions for Refuges in ND/SD and RMIS**

By Ron Shupe

The recent move by Patty Stevens, former Deputy Refuge Supervisor for MT, WY, & UT, to USGS in Fort Collins has stimulated a flurry in position management of the Region 6 Refuges Program. Effective July 28, 2002, Ann Timberman, currently the Deputy Refuge Supervisor for ND/SD will move over to replace Patty Stevens as the Deputy Refuge Supervisor for MT, WY, UT. Bob Barrett, currently the RMIS Branch Chief, will become the Deputy Refuge Supervisor for ND/SD, and finally, Tina Dobrinsky, currently the Volunteer and Community Partnership Coordinator in Washington, will move to Denver to replace Bob as the RMIS Branch Chief.

## **New Addresses For Refuge and Hatchery**

By Joyce Smith

The address for Joles Hole NFH, Utah Management Asst. Office, Colorado River Fish Project and Ouray NFH:  
1380 South 3350 West, Vernal, UT 84078 (same phone numbers)

The address for Ouray National Wildlife Refuge:  
HC 69, Box 232, Randlett, UT 84063.

Physical Address: 19001 East Wildlife Refuge Rd, Randlett, UT 84063 (435) 545-2522.

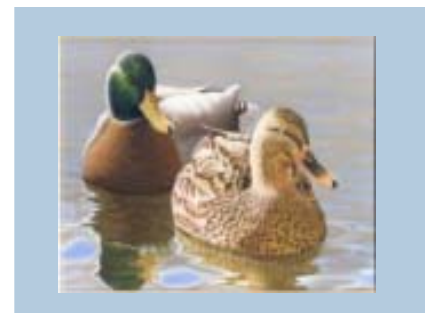
## **Greenwings Day To Be Held At Audubon Refuge**

By Jackie Jacobson

Audubon National Wildlife Refuge will host Greenwings Day on Sunday, August 25, from 1:00 to 5:00pm. Greenwings Day is an educational, fun family event for parents and youth who are interested in learning about wildlife conservation and hunting.

Participants are asked to be at the Refuge Visitor Center to register at 1:00pm. Following registration, four field demonstrations will be held for raptors, fishing, turkey hunting and dog training.

Following the field demonstrations, participants can view the North Dakota Junior Duck Stamp artwork and a waterfowl decoy exhibit. The Douglas Sportsmen's Club and Farmer's Security Bank of Washburn will provide a picnic lunch for everyone. Each family will receive a free "Greenwing Membership", which includes a one year subscription to Puddler Magazine. All participants will receive a package of Greenwing items, as well as chance to win great door prizes.



## **Of Sage and Sky: A field in the Mountain-Prairie Region**

By Matt Kales

On June 3rd, Dan Sobieck, Assistant Regional Director for External Affairs and I loaded up a truck (kindly provided to us by Law Enforcement) with notepads, cameras, and maps and set off on a tour of the northern part of the Region. The purpose of our trip was two-fold: To meet with field staff in order to learn more about their programs in an “on the ground setting,” and to explore ways in which External Affairs can better assist and support field staff and their missions.

Three states, 13 days, 4000 miles, several Spring storms, dozens of energy bars, countless gallons of coffee and one unanticipated dunking in the Missouri River later, we returned back to the Regional Office road-weary but highly impressed by the breadth and scope of activities ongoing in the field, and inspired by the level of commitment and professionalism demonstrated by all of the Service personnel with whom we visited.

While I can’t do justice to our travels in this brief article, I do want to share with you some observations:

Across the board, field staff in the Region are doing more with less, and in a remarkably innovative manner. Take for instance, Saratoga National Fish Hatchery, where staff are raising Wyoming toads, an endangered species, for reintroduction to sites in southern Wyoming, or the Black-footed ferret rearing facility at Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge. Such innovations were the norm, rather than the exception, at the stations we visited and suggests that in the future, the Service will place more emphasis on this type of cross-programmatic approach. While field stations must often make do with limited resources, the Region is on the leading edge of conservation science and technology. Programs such as those underway at the Bozeman Fish Health Center, the Bozeman Fish Technology Center, and the Habitat and Population Evaluation Team in Bismark are constantly pushing the envelope in the search for solutions to critical resource management issues from whirling disease to fish culture to waterfowl production.

The landscapes of the Mountain-Prairie Region are truly dramatic, and our refuges offer an excellent lens through which to appreciate these landscapes and the resources they support, a sort of “representative sample” of the diverse physical geography of the American West. From Seedsdakee to National Elk to Charlie Russell to Des Lacs, we were struck by the biological richness and the history in which these places are steeped, and by the tremendous efforts that go into managing thousands upon thousands of acres of land and water.

Finally, and perhaps most important, I was struck by the genuine hospitality with which we were greeted at every stop. Project leaders, staff and their families welcomed us graciously, often going out of their way to make sure we had the best visit to their station. In addition to informative tours and discussions, we were blessed with home-cooked meals, flawless driving directions, and outstanding fishing advice. As a new Fish and Wildlife employee, it was gratifying to experience first-

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## **Region 6 Profiles Bison Get a Break at National Bison Range**

By Ben Sobieck

There’s plenty of space for bison to stretch out on at the National Bison Range Complex in Moeise, Montana. This was the first refuge ever to be purchased through Congressional appropriations. The first acquisition was purchased in 1908 and consisted of 18,563 acres. Soon to join were the Ninepipe and Pablo NWRs, followed by the Swan River NWR and the Northwest Montana WMD.

The most recent addition to the complex is the Lost Trail NWR, purchased in 1999. In all, the entire complex protects 48,454 acres of land.

A staff of 19 helps to ensure a healthy future for the next generation of bison and works to provide a quality refuge experience for over 250,000 visitors a year.

## **New Web Site for Jones Hole NFH**

By Karen Miranda Gleason

Jones Hole National Fish Hatchery has a new website built with the help of Michele Dutton, Computer Specialist with Regional Office Fisheries Staff.

You may view by clicking this url:  
<http://joneshole.fws.gov>





## Thirteen-year-old goes to World Championships

By Jean Clemens

Thirteen-year-old Erika Anschutz is already one of the best athletes in her sport. Erika is the daughter of Steve Anschutz, Nebraska ES Field Supervisor. She finished first in her

division at tryouts for the U.S. Junior World Team in archery. Erika is now competing in the world championships in Nymburk, Czech Republic. "It's pretty exciting", she said. "It'll be my first international competition."

Erika has set 62 national records and has won 19 national titles in archery. This 8<sup>th</sup> grader is ranked first in the U.S. in the 16-and-under Girls Compound division. Erika hopes to represent the United States in the 2008 Olympic Summer Games at Beijing, China.

## Of Sage and Sky Continue

hand all that I had heard previously about the comradery and sense of "family" that exists within the Service.

This is not to say that everything is perfect in the field. We learned enough to know that our field stations, and our Region as a whole, is facing a great many political and fiscal challenges. Sobering as this reality may be, we also learned enough to know that the people we met during these two weeks are more than capable of meeting these challenges, and we look forward to helping with that process in any way we can.

Our brief glimpse of the Region whet our appetite for more interaction with the field, and before the engine had even cooled from the last leg of our trip, we were planning our next series of site visits. In the meantime, if you have questions about or need assistance with legislative and/or external affairs matters, please don't hesitate to contact External Affairs at (303) 236-7905.

## New Leave Share Recipient

By Pat Michael

Terri Middlemist, an Office Automation Clerk at the National Bison Range, Moiese, Montana, is an approved leave share recipient. Terri's husband, Ross, was involved in a tractor versus semi-truck accident on April 27, 2002.

Leave donations are confidential. To make a leave donation, complete a Leave Donation Form (OF 630-A) and submit to Pat Michael, in the Human Resources Office. Please call 303-236-5414, extension 405 for additional information.

## Native American Affairs

By David Redhorse

Early this week the 10<sup>th</sup> U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled on a combined case involving individuals who used eagle feathers in their religious practices. One person, Saenz, is a descendant of the Chiricahua Apaches, who are no longer federally recognized American Indians. The other two, Hardman and Wilgus, are non-Indians who possessed feathers for religious purposes.

The Circuit Court applied the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). Section 3(b) provides that *the government may substantially burden a person's exercise of religion only if it demonstrates that application of the burden to the person (1) is in furtherance of a compelling governmental interest; and (2) is the least restrictive means of furthering that compelling governmental interest.* The Circuit Court concluded that the government failed to show that limiting eagle permits only to members of federally recognized tribes is the least restrictive means of advancing the government's interests in preserving eagle populations and protecting Native American culture.

For Saenz, he could possess eagle feathers for religious purposes because the government failed to show how the permitting process advances its compelling interests. The outcome for Hardman and Wilgus is uncertain because their cases were remanded.

Does this mean should the Circuit Court's decision stand? Some (probably most) American Indian tribes fear that anyone can claim adherence to some Native American religion and possess eagle feathers. These tribes do not wish to expose their traditional life ways to a wider variety of people to foster Native American culture and religion. They also lament the limited supply of eagle parts, the increased demand, and the long wait to receive feathers. Their hope hinges on how well the government clarifies how the current regulations serve its interests to conserve eagles and protect Native cultures on remand in Hardman and Wilgus (as the Circuit Court suggests).

# Regional Director's Column

By John Blankenship

I was recently in Washington DC, with some Regional field personnel, for briefings before the Director and the Assistant Secretary. These briefings had the potential to be very controversial in that they were about the designation of Critical Habitat.

As I was sitting in the stuffy conference room listening to questions, and hearing how well prepared our people were with answers, I began to think of our regional personnel. What a wonderful bunch you are. We often forget to tell you just how good you are. Let me iterate again, "You are wonderful and dedicated employees".

Although we were not sure what questions would come our way, our folks were prepared and extremely professional. We expected and got questions about our science and about partnerships, and we answered them all without hesitation and with a great deal of certainty. After the final briefing of the day, Assistant Secretary Manson told us that the briefings were excellent, the presenters well prepared and that we had obviously done our homework.

Looking back, we made a positive stroke for the resources we are paid to take care of. We had made headway with a new administration that is still not sure how to relate to us. We had done our job well!

I am amazed by the dedication and commitment of our Region 6 employees. Whether it is a hatchery manager on duty 24/7 to keep the water flowing in the raceway; an administrative officer or budget person scrambling through end of year procedures; ES'ers who have to deal with regulatory matters that the general public does not always understand; the refuge biologist conducting surveys in all kinds of weather; those involved in prescribed fire that has turned into fire fighting throughout the west; law enforcement personnel who have to face "yahoos" with guns; federal aid folks who are the States' best friends when delivering money but not when the audit shows that it wasn't spent correctly; you are all appreciated.

Our region deals with a lot of high visibility issues and we continue to handle them with thought, professionalism, partnerships and courteousness. I want our people to be the best, to enjoy what they are doing and enjoy their lives. Therefore, I am designating FY-03 as Region 6 "People Year". We are going to try to help you do your job more efficiently, with more tools and support. We want to know what your needs are. We are aware of some issues; such as how to deal with the job when there aren't enough people to do it; how to prioritize work when everything is a priority; and how to partner successfully; but please let us know any other needs that you have.

Both Ralph and I appreciate your hard work and dedication. Your professionalism shines through every day. You should be proud, as we are, to be speaking for the American people on fish and wildlife issues. Keep up the outstanding efforts and don't forget to enjoy it.

## Congressional Affairs Update

By Matt Kales

With both the House of Representatives and the Senate in recess until after Labor Day, Congressional focus has shifted to the field. Steve Brimm at DC Booth Historic Fish Hatchery in Spearfish, South Dakota recently reported that Senator Tim Johnson (D) recently stopped by for a visit, and Jerre Gamble at the Flint Hills NWR in Kansas hosted Representative Jerry Moran (R-1st) for an evening.

Field and RO staff have been busy briefing Congressional staffers on various issues as well, including Wasatch Front Spotted frog conservation status (UT delegation), Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program activities (Rep. Scott McInnis, R-3rd), and Service programs in North Dakota (ND Congressional delegation).

High-level officials from the Department of Interior are also making visits to our region to meet with Congressionals home on recess: Secretary of Interior Norton will attend a public meeting in the Black Hills of South Dakota hosted by Representative John Thune (SD-R) to discuss Black-tailed prairie dog issues and the Endangered Species Act, and Assistant Secretary of Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks Manson will meet with Nebraska Congressman Tom Osborne (R-3rd) in Grand Island to discuss Whooping crane critical habitat.

Following Labor Day, Congress will likely have a full plate as they attempt to conclude all outstanding business before adjourning in early October.

The Mountain-Prairie Review is a monthly publication produced by the USFWS Region 6 External Affairs Office. Publisher: Ralph Morgenweck, Regional Director; Editor: Dan Sobieck, ARD-EA; Staff Writers: Karen Miranda Gleason, Matt Kales, Diane Katzenberger, David Redhorse, Sharon Rose, Desera Anderson-Utley; Design and Layout: Heather Gonzalez, IRM/ Jean Clemens, EA. All contributions from Region 6 employees are welcomed and will be considered for publication.